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GUNG HO, RAIDER!

THE PHILOSOPHY AND METHODS OF  
BRIG GEN EVANS F. CARLSON, MARINE CORPS RAIDER

by

Kathleen M. Gomrick, Major, USAF

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Advisor: Dr. Richard Muller

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## *Preface*

The purpose of my research is to examine the character and context of a radical military leader whose short and arguably successful tenure is often overlooked in American military history. Brigadier General Carlson's story first caught my attention as a high school student when I was intrigued by the stories of the Second World War, specifically the battles in the Pacific. The 2d Marine Raider Battalion struck me as a true American legend. While most have heard of their battlecry "Gung Ho," few know its origins and fewer still have studied the mentality it represented to the marines who coined the phrase.

We can learn lessons about small team leadership from Carlson's example. I believe the American military is not ready, and perhaps rightly so, for Carlson's methods on a grand scale, but as our deployment forces tailor to smaller teams, the ideals of democratic authority, unity of purpose and "work together" may have new relevance. We don't have to march with the Chinese (as Carlson did) to learn these lessons, we have our own history now, if we only take the time to study it.

I would like to acknowledge the guidance and assistance I received from Dr. Richard Muller, my faculty research advisor. He took this project on when his plate was already full, "encouraged" libraries to lend me their treasured primary source documents, and helped make this research project possible.

### ***Abstract***

While nearly every great military leader enthusiastically acknowledges the importance of morale and cohesion to any unit's success, few actually make these elements the central focus of their command. It is rarer still to find commanders that employ all-encompassing programs to shape the spirits, as well as the minds and bodies, of their charges. Brig Gen Evans F. Carlson, perhaps more so than any other American military leader, believed that ethical indoctrination was the foundation of a fighting force's success. He cultivated an atmosphere of mutually supported individual effort rooted in righteous and democratic beliefs. A strong sense of duty punctuated by a consistent example of honor led him from small town Vermont to the Pacific beachheads of World War II. His concept of why men fight, and hard-gained knowledge of how men can fight, combined to create the almost fanatical 2d Marine Raider Battalion. Their motto, "Gung Ho," lives on in military lore today. Their leader, Carlson, was perhaps unique in the American military experience.

By drawing from the numerous books, articles, diaries and notes authored by Carlson himself, his letters to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, as well as first-hand and historical accounts of the battles he engaged in, I will examine the origin of Carlson's philosophies and how they were translated into Raider training methods. Finally, I will describe the lessons for small team leadership that can be derived from his example. The American military has changed since World War II, but even a well organized, trained and equipped

fighting man requires a belief in something greater than himself to muster the physical and moral courage to accomplish the extraordinary in battle. For Carlson's Raiders that something bigger was their team, their country, and their way of life.

There is a place today for Gung Ho ethical indoctrination, but individualism will most likely remain the hallmark of America and her military. There will always be those that give fully of themselves, subordinating personal gratification to lofty ideals. They are heroes. An entire unit that puts a premium on understanding the "whys" of their fight, and then trains together to accomplish the mission is rare. In World War II, they were Carlson's Raiders.

## Chapter 1

### Carlson's Context

*The most important thing is that the leader must believe strongly in his work and must be progressive politically.*

—Capt Evans F. Carlson  
Diary of Evans F. Carlson<sup>1</sup>

A unique man, who lived in a unique time, Carlson searched for structure and found it in the military. His uncompromising character led him to seek out experiences that fueled his belief in the nobility of man and the efficacy of democracy. His time with the Chinese Eighth Route Army provided the building blocks of his tactical innovations. His study of Chinese industrial co-operatives gave him the mental framework for his Gung Ho indoctrination.

Raised in a strict, religious environment with a preacher for a father, Evans Fordyce Carlson left his Vermont home at age fourteen already firm in his belief that selfless devotion to others must be the basis of success.<sup>2</sup> At age sixteen, he enlisted in the Army, and five years later was commissioned a second lieutenant. After seeing duty in France during the last days of World War I with General Pershing, Carlson left the Army in 1919 as a captain with decorations from the United States, France and Italy.<sup>3</sup> Uncomfortable with civilian life he returned to the military in 1922 as a Marine private. Within a year he was in Officer Candidate School and thinking about leadership.

Tempered by his experience in the Army, his thoughts on leadership began to

combine military discipline and efficiency with the moral teachings of his youth. In an essay titled “An Interpretation of Military Ethics,” Carlson began to codify his belief that an obligation to societal welfare formed the basis of ethics and a military society also had defining rules to be followed, without hesitation, to achieve the greatest benefit for the whole.<sup>4</sup> He tied the notion of moral obligation to military efficiency. This belief formed the basis for his military experience.

In 1927 Carlson got his long awaited wish--service in China. Personally selected by future Commandant of the Marine Corps, then Maj A. A. Vandergift, to serve as his operations and training officer, Carlson left for the Far East.<sup>5</sup> In China in the 1920s, was transitioning from a feudal structure of warlords to a central government. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek led the newly formed nationalist Kuomintang government, which was quickly challenged by communist rebels. Adding to the internal strife and burgeoning civil war, Japanese forces invaded Shanghai with an imperialistic vision for the entire region. Communist forces in northern Japan, specifically the Eighth Route Army under the leadership of General Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung, also battled the Japanese. Mao eventually persuaded Chiang Kai-shek to join forces with the rebels to defeat Japan. Initially sympathetic to the Kuomintang party, Carlson’s views would change as he delved deeper into Chinese politics.

Marines had long been in China and were a familiar part of the landscape during this time of internal turbulence. With a strong desire to keep the Chinese from embracing communist ideologies, America had a keen interest in the area. Extensive holdings by the Standard Oil Company certainly increased American resolve. Wanting to understand more about the war, Carlson traveled through many battle areas until his departure in



1929.

The next two years were spent in Nicaragua where Carlson earned more decorations<sup>6</sup> and experienced guerilla warfare for the first time.<sup>7</sup> His mind was still full of thoughts of China and he was able to return in 1933 as a Military Intelligence Officer. Within months, he requested and was granted transfer from Shanghai to Peking as Adjunct to the American Legation General. Always self-conscious about his lack of formal schooling, Carlson set to work to learn all he could about the Chinese culture. He embraced the language as well as the arts, and kept company with western journalists and intellectuals who, in turn, helped influence U.S. policy towards China.

Now Carlson began to openly discuss his ideas of morality and ethics. He became the editor of *The Legation Guard News* and taught classes to western expatriates as a way to continue his own education. The Guard however, was not as enamored of the Chinese and was plagued by discipline problems. Carlson was at a loss for how to reverse the trend. Carlson believed that the antagonism of the 500 guards was based on indifference sprung from ignorance. With permission from his commander, Colonel Rixley, Carlson started to offer classes to the men similar to the ones he taught to the civilians. The yearlong course focussed on the Chinese language and “romanizing” the characters. Combined with historical stories and practical information on China in *The Legation Guard News*, Carlson had a plan. In his own words, “The editorial was 250 words and I always tried to point (to) a moral to change the attitude of the men toward the Chinese—to make them see the Chinese as human beings, different but real.”<sup>8</sup> The results were dramatic. Discipline improved by 90%, leading Carlson to the conclusion that “when soldiers are given information about the situation in which they act and live they derive

from it a sense of responsibility.”<sup>9</sup>

This “sense of responsibility” was the touchstone that Carlson had been trying to find since his days as an Army captain. Carlson, as do most military leaders, saw the fighting man’s struggle as a matter of duty. He took this further by evoking a sense of responsibility based on an understanding of why the struggle was essential. He believed it was important that men believe in the principles they are defending and understand the enemy as a threat to those principles.

As Carlson’s philosophy took shape, it became more intertwined with his Chinese experience. Although he wanted to stay abroad, the military is a transient life and Carlson returned stateside as an aide to Maj Gen Charles H. Lyman. Within the year he was reassigned to Warm Springs, Georgia taking a position with the Marine Guard at President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Little White House.<sup>10</sup> Here he developed a great respect for his Commander-in-Chief and struck an alliance with Roosevelt that changed Carlson’s life, and perhaps even the Marine Corps’ future.

In 1937 Carlson’s request to return to China was approved, but along with the formal orders was a request from the President himself to forward directly to him appraisals of the Chinese situation, a frequent practice for FDR.<sup>11</sup> The correspondence was to remain strictly confidential. This personal request was taken very seriously, and as with every assignment Carlson took on, he followed through. What each did not know at the time was how closely their lives were to entwine. When Carlson was forming his soon to be famous Raider battalion during World War II, the man he chose to be his executive officer was none other than Maj James Roosevelt, the President’s son.

Returning to China as a military observer, officially Assistant Naval Attaché in

Shanghai, Carlson was free to travel and spend more time learning the philosophies of the Chinese armies.

Always on a mission to further his knowledge, Carlson read a newly published book by journalist and longtime friend, Ed Snow. *Red Star Over China* introduced Carlson to communist rebels Mao Tse-tung and General Chu Teh of the Chinese Eighth Route Army to whom Snow eventually arranged an introduction.<sup>12</sup> Thoroughly impressed with his host, Carlson was able to interview various members of the General's staff. In his book *The Big Yankee*, Michael Blankfort recounts a conversation where Jen Peh-his, the political director of General Chu Teh's staff, tells Carlson that the Army and the people must work together in harmony:

Work together... Gung Ho! There it was again.... "How do your officers and men Gung Ho?" Carlson asked in pidgin Chinese. The question was crucial. This was the knot of military life which he had not yet been able to unravel. "By political work," Jen Peh-his said. "It is the life line of our army. Indoctrination...First, we must teach our soldiers to read. When units are on the march lesson papers are pinned on the back of the man ahead, so that our illiterate soldier may study as he marches. By every device we can think of, meetings, plays, games, cartoons, and of course, by example, we try to teach our men and ourselves the principles of honesty, humility and co-operation."<sup>13</sup>

A second revelation came when Carlson asked about the status of officers:

"What are officers?" Jen Peh-his asked. "They are leaders. And how do we tell whether a man is a leader? He is a leader if he has given his men convincing proof of his ability to lead, his correctness and swiftness of decision, his courage, his willingness to share everything with his men. If he proves all this, then he is respected. His men have confidence in him. But men and their leaders are comrades. Off duty, they are on equal social basis. They salute only on duty—and only when they are addressing each other formally for purposes of transacting business."<sup>14</sup>

The thesis was culminating for Carlson and the interview continued. When Carlson asked "How much of your plans of the battle do you tell your men?" the reply struck a nerve just waiting for stimulation:

“Yes,” Jen Peh-his added. “That’s another thing, Ts’an Tsan. Before our troops go into battles the leaders hold a meeting with them and explain the reasons for the engagement and the tactics that will be used. After the battle another meeting is held at which time we discuss our mistakes, for only by knowing our mistakes, men and leaders together, can we learn how to correct them.”<sup>15</sup>

Carlson’s perceived connection between understanding the nature of a well-ordered society and the purpose of the battle was articulated to him for the first time. What made the Eighth Route Army function so well, what made each soldier able to withstand great hardship without complaint, was knowledge and an understanding of the “why” of the fight. It was ethical indoctrination. He had to see this concept in action, first hand. After garnering permission from both his command and the Chinese, Carlson went north and began a three-month odyssey as an observer with the Eighth Route Army guerillas, watching their brand of ethical indoctrination defy Japanese efforts at every turn. He met with Mao Tse-tung and wrote of him, “the vision of him that would remain with me was this picture of a humble, kindly, lonely genius, striving here in the darkness of the night to find a peaceful and an equitable way of life for his people.”<sup>16</sup>

During his 1,000-mile march with the Eighth Route Army, he saw how small raiding parties of four to six men could move effectively through the jungle and accomplish small objectives more efficiently than an element of 12 or 13 (the current American doctrine). He saw the guerillas move into a village and leave it better off than when they arrived, paying for the food and shelter they used. He saw officers and men sharing conditions and the work. He saw the guerillas march 43 miles in 32 hours without complaint and with very little food or water.<sup>17</sup> He saw how every man understood the importance of the mission and how that understanding inspired them to go on. Perhaps just as importantly, he saw the brutality of the Japanese. He wrote it all

down. He sent letters to President Roosevelt and told him what he knew.

When Carlson came down from the North, he began to speak out against the atrocities of the Japanese invaders and of the desperate plight of the rural Chinese people. He tried to convince Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek to bolster the northern armies.<sup>18</sup> He wrote articles and spoke candidly to the press about the dangers of America continuing to support the Japanese with military and economic trade. In Hankow, he spoke to reporters and told them it was their duty to report that the U.S. was furnishing Japan with war materials that would one day be used to attack America.<sup>19</sup> Such derisive, candid, and public denouncement of American policy was simply unacceptable in a military officer. He was warned to stop in September 1938 and subsequently tried to resign his commission. Carlson's diary reads,

I am tired of attempting to adjust my action to the arbitrary whims of a superior officer. Self preservation seems to be the first thought of an officer of the U.S. Army or Navy. His whole training tends to accentuate that inclination. As a result he tends to take the short view of things, considering each problem in terms of his personal economic security...Consequently, it seems to be indicated that I should separate myself from the service if I am to be able to think and act in accordance with my own convictions. With this conviction in mind I today sent in my resignation...It is quite a *rench* [*sic*] to break the associations of so many years.<sup>20</sup>

His request was denied. When ordered to cease all comment on the Chinese condition, Carlson again tendered his resignation in April 1939—he was eligible for retirement in August 1940. His sense of personal responsibility and obligation would not permit him to stand quietly by while his own country was inviting Japanese aggression on the world by ignoring their barbarous practices in China. As Carlson said, “I have a responsibility to tell because I know.”<sup>21</sup>

With hard-gained knowledge and the freedom to express it, Carlson spoke to

economic and industrial leaders. He outlined Japanese objectives and championed an Act of Congress to embargo of the Japanese war machine supplied by American scrap metal.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most controversial was his view that China must be supported, and not just Chiang Kai-Shek, but through him the communist guerillas.<sup>23</sup> He wrote articles and most notably his books, *The Chinese Army* and *Twin Stars of China*. Labeled a communist by some and a zealot by others, his message was generally unheeded by mainstream politicians and industrialists. He returned to China as a civilian and was introduced to industrialist Rewi Alley. Alley was hired by the Chinese government to organize small, mobile, peasant factories that could operate despite Japanese raids. He successfully attracted international sponsorship and organized the population around the idea. Carlson traveled with Alley touring these portable factories and was impressed with their efficiency. The workers' determination to constantly adapt to changes in Japanese positions and to consistently subordinate personal reward to the needs of the cooperative made a lasting impression. It was an organizational marvel to be sure, but more interesting to Carlson, it was a mentality. Their slogan was "Gung Ho," Chinese for "work harmony" or "work together."<sup>24</sup>

Carlson returned to the states more convinced than ever of the impending war with Japan. In an interview with the Los Angeles *Daily News*, Carlson predicted an American war with Japan and the need to prepare for a guerilla war in the Philippine Islands.<sup>25</sup> Combined with this printed call to arms, Carlson spoke to every organization that would have him about the need to cut off Japan, and support the Chinese rebels. By now, the acknowledged corruption of the Kuomintang government made it lose favor with Carlson and he focused his efforts toward supporting the Eighth Route Army

exclusively.

From the global perspective, the Eighth Route Army, and their leader Mao Tse-tung, had become synonymous with communism. Carlson viewed them differently however, and had no problem amalgamating American democracy with the Chinese communist ideals. As he wrote to President Roosevelt,

The Chinese Communist group (so-called) is not communistic in the sense that we are accustomed to use the term. Its economic program does not include the communization of land and the redistribution of property. I would call them a group of Liberal Democrats, perhaps Social-Democrats (but not of the Nazi breed)...The leaders of the Eighth Route Army have developed a group of Chinese whose attitude toward the problems of life, and whose conduct, more nearly approaches our own than do those of any other large Chinese group.<sup>26</sup>

While FDR may have understood Carlson's subtle understanding of terms, military and civilian industry leaders focused on his cries to aid known communists. This outspoken support led to him being labeled a communist, a perception that followed him throughout his military career.

As war with the Japanese seemed imminent, Carlson felt an obligation to rejoin the military. In 1941 Carlson approached the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major General Holcomb, requesting reinstatement, and was once again Major Carlson.<sup>27</sup> His time in China and Nicaragua led him to propose a different kind of military organization to face the threat he predicted. Carlson wanted a commando unit formed. The Marines were expanding their amphibious assault doctrine and a small, guerilla unit coming ashore on the islands in the Pacific could be a decisive factor when fighting the Japanese he had studied so well. Carlson was just one of the many proponents of an elite group within the Marine Corps. Having the President's son as an additional advocate certainly helped.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who was very impressed with his own elite units,<sup>28</sup> encouraged the President to form an American commando force. With pressure from within and above, Marine Commandant Maj Gen Thomas Holcomb begrudgingly authorized two new battalions.<sup>29</sup> It was February 1942 and Carlson, soon to be a Lieutenant Colonel, was to lead the West Coast unit. Camp Elliot, California became the home of the 2d Separate Battalion and later that same month, they were redesignated the 2d Raider Battalion.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Papers of Evans Fordyce Carlson, Brig. Gen., USMC*, (California State College, Fullerton: Fullerton, CA, 1971), microfiche. Carlson's diary, undated entry, sometime between Dec 1937 and Feb 1938 (hereafter diary entries cited as Carlson's diary).

<sup>2</sup> *Papers of Evans Fordyce Carlson, Brig. Gen., USMC*, (California State College, Fullerton: Fullerton, Calif, 1971), microfiche and Michael Blankfort, *The Big Yankee* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 279.

<sup>3</sup> Maj Gen Oscar F. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All, The Raider Marines of World War II* (Irvine: ReView Publications, 1995), 5. Interestingly, the officer that administered Carlson's Army Oath of Enlistment was Capt James Schewerin whose son William later served in the Marines as a company commander in the 1st Raider Battalion.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Blankfort, *The Big Yankee* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 124.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China at War* (New York: China and Us Publications, 1993), 5. When Carlson went to China with Vandergrift and the Fourth Marines, there was no military intelligence officer. Carlson convinced Vandergrift of its necessity and consequently became the Regimental Intelligence Officer.

<sup>6</sup> Carlson helped organize relief operations after a major earthquake and was awarded his first Navy Cross. His contact with rebel guerillas in Nicaragua may well have been his first experience with unorthodox small team tactics.

<sup>7</sup> Maj Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War*, Marines in World War II Commemorative Series (Washington D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1995), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China at War*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 169. This story appears in numerous works and is even recounted in General Peatross' book, *Bless 'Em All, Marine Raiders of World War II*, where he speaks of Carlson recounting the experience to his troops. The moral was that "understanding might be the key to social harmony." 6.

<sup>10</sup> Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China at War*, 6-9.

<sup>11</sup> Carlson to Marguerite LeHand, Washington D.C. 11 September 1937. Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China*, 11. The arrangement was for Carlson to address the letters



## Notes

to the President's personal secretary, Marguerite LeHand, presumably to camouflage their final destination.

<sup>12</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 188-9.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-1. The general ideas in this passage, as well as the two that follow, are described in Carlson's diary. While this verbatim conversation is not in the diary, the ideas relayed correspond to entries that are chronologically consistent with Carlson's travel with the Eighth Route Army and his interview with Jen Peh-his.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>16</sup> Rewi Alley, *Six Americans in China* (Beijing, China: Intercul, 1985), 221.

<sup>17</sup> Carlson's diary, 23 January 1938. In his book, General Peatross recounts Carlson telling the story and that Carlson attributed the feat to the soldier's desire to fight and to do his duty. Peatross, however, took the more cynical view that the Chinese soldiers more likely feared retribution for stopping than continued out of duty.

<sup>18</sup> J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1987), 217.

<sup>19</sup> Peatross, *Bless 'Em All*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Carlson's diary, 18 September 1938.

<sup>21</sup> Alley, *Six Americans in China*, 213.

<sup>22</sup> Carlson to President Roosevelt, 9 March 1940, Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China at War, 1937-1941*, 56. Some historians argue that this embargo triggered the Japanese attack.

<sup>23</sup> Carlson to LeHand, 17 March 1939, *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> The story of the origin of the phrase "Gung Ho" was common to all sources.

<sup>25</sup> Blankfort, *Big Yankee*, 286.

<sup>26</sup> Carlson to LeHand, 4 March 1948, Deane, ed., *Evans F. Carlson on China at War, 1937-1941*, 22-3.

<sup>27</sup> Since Carlson had resigned his commission while a regular officer, he could only return as a part of the Reserves, but was immediately activated to active duty.

<sup>28</sup> Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> According to Moskin in *The U.S. Marine Corps History*, two captains were sent to Europe to study commando operations. Compounded with urging from Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Holcomb agreed to the new organizations. Lt Col Merritt "Red" Edson had been commanding a raiding battalion specially equipped and trained according to General Smith's amphibious doctrine. This formed the basis for the 1st Separate Battalion. Carlson had worked for Holcomb in Nicaragua and Holcomb was familiar with Carlson's China history. Carlson was chosen to lead the 2d Separate Battalion to be formed on the West Coast. According to General Peatross, in Dec 1941 Carlson drafted a recommendation for a guerilla-type unit and forwarded the proposal to the Commandant. An uncommon tactic, but it certainly may have helped put his name at the top of the list to command the new unit.

## Chapter 2

### Carlson's Military Methodology

*In the years to come you members of this battalion who pioneered the work of streamlining an organization with a view to out-hiking, out-maneuvering, out-witting and out-fighting the troops of the Axis powers; you who proved to the world the value of democratic practices in connection with military operations, and who further gave proof of the practicability and deep significance of what we are pleased to call the Gung Ho spirit; you men will tell with pride of your part in this great work.*

—Lt Col Evans F. Carlson  
Speech, April 1942

Carlson was given a free hand organizing his Raiders. His methods were as unorthodox as Marine training could be; however, his goal was the same as any commander. He wanted to train a fighting force that could answer the call and complete any mission assigned. What made him different was his approach. He envisioned a force that fought because it had an obligation to fight. He wanted a unit where every man was as committed to the cause as the next, and every man worked together because that was the right thing to do. He wanted Gung Ho Raiders.

Before he could train 1,000 men, he had to find 1,000 men—the right men. Carlson started with his executive officer, Capt James Roosevelt. The 1st Raider Battalion sent some of its troops to form the initial ranks of the 2d, but Carlson rejected many of them.<sup>1</sup> Once the new unit advertised its mission, Carlson didn't have to wait

long for volunteers. One by one, Carlson, Roosevelt, and the other Raider officers interviewed the walk-ins. The questions were tough and as Carlson expected, few showed they understood the nature of the war or the reason their sacrifice was demanded. Confident in his ability to shape their minds because of his strong belief in America, Carlson was undaunted. “I won’t take a man who doesn’t give a damn about anything,” he told Jimmy Roosevelt, “But if he has a deep feeling about wanting to fight, even for the wrong reasons, take him. I know I can shape him into wanting to fight for the right reasons.”<sup>2</sup>

Carlson had the luxury of choosing his own men based on his own criteria. He did not have to seek approval from any higher headquarters or justify refusals in response to congressional inquiries. He was able to disqualify men who had families and couldn’t devote all of their attention to training. He disqualified men that were eager for a perceived “quick tour” with a “glory” unit. He disqualified men if he felt they just didn’t have the heart to complete a 50-mile hike. He remembered the faces he saw in China and he looked for those faces.

In his first unorthodox Commander’s Call, Carlson set the tone. He began with *The Star Spangled Banner* and proceeded to explain how he proposed to operate the unit. The practice of democracy was foreign to an American military unit but it was not to be foreign to the Second Raiders. The training was to be brutally hard because the mission demanded it, but the reasons for the training were going to be made clear. The nature of any guerilla unit was highly disciplined, an effective guerilla unit also required a touchstone—ethical indoctrination. Carlson intended to put the tenets he ascribed to the Chinese Army into practice with his own men. As Carlson wrote:

The effectiveness of all such forces depends almost entirely on the amount of ethical indoctrination which they have assimilated. If they are thoroughly disciplined and inspired with a high sense of duty, they are very effective. Without such training they tend to degenerate into bandits.<sup>3</sup>

From the same bullhorn he used to introduce the concept of ethical indoctrination to his troops, he introduced their battlecry. He explained the meaning of the Chinese phrase “Gung Ho.” He explained that effectiveness is as simple as working together. They repeated the words and made them their own. Carlson required that Gung Ho be a complete lifestyle. Every marine must work with every other marine. All must meet the rigorous standards and all must internalize the desire to subjugate the tendency to comfort oneself despite the discomforts of, or at the expense of, others.

That day in China...I saw in practice the secret of the Chinese Eighth Route Army. Two words—‘ethical indoctrination.’ Those are big words, boys, but let me tell you simply what they mean. The reason those 600 men were able to endure such hardship was because they knew *why* it was necessary for them to complete that march. But more important than that, they knew *why* that march was important to the whole series of battles they were fighting; and they knew *why* these battles were important to the whole war against the Japs. And the war against the Japs was one they understood and believed in. In short, they understood why the efforts of every single one of them was necessary for the victory of the whole Chinese people. That’s ethical indoctrination.<sup>4</sup> (Emphasis in original)

Comfort not being a primary concern, the 2d Raiders set up shop at a nearby farm. Carlson and his men converted Jacques Farm to a specialized training camp.<sup>5</sup> Recalling the words of the Chinese political officer, he began to conduct meetings to teach the men about the war. Each man was to understand each battle in the context of the war, as well as America’s overarching objectives. These were soon dubbed Gung Ho meetings and were an open forum for troops to ask questions and voice concerns. Since these raiders were not permitted liberty or passes on the weekends, Gung Ho meetings were also a sort of relaxed social event. They served to draw all of the marines together and foster

camaraderie.

This town meeting mentality enabled Carlson to discuss his expectations and philosophies without the multiple filters and editorial comments of lower-echelon leaders. While never abdicating his position of authority, he fostered an atmosphere of accessibility felt by each marine. His goal was to promote an understanding that would lead to each member having a personal stake in the mission, a sense of responsibility to each other and to the outcome of the battle and the war. The military was inherently non-democratic and Carlson wanted to take a different approach. Again modeling on the Chinese soldiers he observed, this commander wanted consensus rather than blind obedience, believing that such understanding would allow marines to be aggressive in battle rather than wait for orders when opportunities arose. Carlson understood however, that viable consensus could only be developed if all understood what was at stake. As Carlson stated when describing why the Chinese were able to sustain severe physical hardship, “The reason lies in the desire which has been created in each individual to perform his duty. The emphasis is on volition.”<sup>6</sup> Carlson’s objective was to inform so that agreement came naturally and was based on the mission and the good of the whole. He articulated a congruence between personal sacrifice and American victory.

Surely not all were in agreement during the newly formed 2d Raiders first 50-mile hike. No team forms quickly and Carlson’s vision for his team would require more concentrated effort than most. As a complement to rigorous physical training, arguably the most demanding regimen of any unit of his day, the men were able stretch their minds during the Friday night Gung Ho meetings. The open example set by the leaders also advanced the cause of democratic military ideals. Officers were afforded no special

privileges. All the officers participated in the marches, and Carlson, now 46 years old, set the pace. Officers ate rations and shared quarters identical to those of the men. This was basic to the ethical approach that Carlson espoused.

Probably no other quality of leadership is more effective in inspiring confidence and stimulating the cooperation of followers than the willingness of leaders to share with their followers the material conditions which exigencies of a situation impose.<sup>7</sup>

Carlson took his belief seriously that leader status should be earned, and that rank should reflect that status. He requested a variance to his personnel rank structure. Those marines most capable of leading were put in charge of his small teams and Carlson believed these marines should have rank commensurate with their leadership positions. The Marine Corps denied his request.<sup>8</sup>

Both Raider Battalions were given incredible leeway with many aspects of the standard Marine light infantry equipment. Lt Col Mike Edson of the 1st Raiders proposed the initial revised Table of Allowances that both battalions were to follow; however, Carlson and his officers focused on the Raider mission and decided to organize and equip their men accordingly. First, Carlson pared down the basic fighting formation from an eight-man squad to a three-man fire team.<sup>9</sup> In 1942, Marine medical support was organized at the battalion level. Carlson's vision of small unit mobility and self-sustaining operations necessitated medical support at the company level. He included a surgeon and three corpsmen in each company. Individual companies now had organic medical support and to complete the package, Carlson included a weapons platoon in each company instead of the doctrinally correct organization of a consolidated weapons company controlled at the battalion level.<sup>10</sup>

Smaller units of organization required increased firepower and here the Raiders

were successful in their requests to higher headquarters. While his counterparts in the 1st Raiders were also experimenting with improved weapons, Carlson put special emphasis on equipment. Appreciating the lighter, more accurate semiautomatic M1 Garand .30-caliber rifle, he made them standard issue in the 2d Raiders when the majority of the Marine Corps were still using the older, heavier, 1903 Springfield.<sup>11</sup> Many other weapons not common to light infantry units were integrated into the fireteam concept. The increased firepower made the smaller teams very lethal and able to confidently attack enemy contingents larger than their own.

Not only was Carlson's fireteam adapted as the basic organization for light infantry to this day, and the M1 to be the standard issue weapon in the Army and Marine Corps, but other 2d Raider innovations have taken their place as military essentials. The Raiders tested various boots to include Oregon logging boots, which came to be known as "Raider boots."<sup>12</sup> Knives became important to the Raiders. Again Carlson saw to the specifications first hand. It had to be useful for hand-to-hand combat and for getting through tough jungle terrain. At the time, the Marine Corps did not issue knives and was generally opposed to the idea, but that didn't stop Carlson and 1,000 of the specially commissioned blades were issued to the 2d Raiders when their training moved from California to Hawaii.<sup>13</sup> While specialty knives became important to all raiders, Carlson's "Gung Ho" knife started the process. Its design and operational inspiration was the British Commando stiletto. The weapon evolved into the standard issue, now famous, Ka-Bar. According to descriptions in *Bless 'Em All--Marine Raiders of World War II*, p. 135 and 228, the original Ka-Bar had a seven-inch blade and Carlson's sported a nine and one-quarter inch edge. As World War II wore on, other manufacturers produced Marine

issue knives, but most were based on the Ka-Bar design.

The 2d Raiders also introduced camouflage uniforms. For their first foray into battle, the raid on Makin Atoll, their green fatigues were dyed black. Eventually, patterned fabric was used to aid concealment in jungle terrain. Carlson had the uncanny ability to look beyond the surface to the root of an issue. When observing the Chinese, he saw their mindset as their greatest weapon and when commanding his battalion, he saw beyond the standard Table of Allowances and equipped his men for their mission.

His attention to their needs in battle, as shown by his tough physical training and concern for equipment, opened their minds to his ethical message. They trained harder than any other unit in the Corps, and were treated differently by their leadership. This created an almost fanatical devotion to their unit. The idea of Gung Ho was starting to take hold; it was starting to mean something. They were American commandos, a breed apart and proud of it. They had learned how to fight guerilla-style, how to think Carlson-style and now they had to learn how to use small rubber boats Marine-style.

Carlson was making a name for himself with his methods and equipment. When he left for Hawaii for amphibious landing training, he and his men earned the following comments from Admiral Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, in his report to the Commander, U.S. Fleet, on 23 April 1942:

After two or three weeks training in the Hawaiian area the Raider Battalion will be ready for such operations as may be assigned. The battalion, by virtue of morale, organization, equipment, training, and development of individual initiative and encouragement of individual initiative and resourcefulness, is a striking force with strength out of proportion to its numbers...<sup>14</sup>

In both the Navy and the Marine Corps, the brass was beginning to take sides on the notion of Marine commando-type units. The Commandant of the Marine Corps, Major



General Holcomb, had never been a big fan of specialty units within the Corps. Although he had authorized the two Separate Battalions, he had been uncomfortable with the decision from the start, believing that all marines were capable of landing on islands and conducting raids. On the other side of the issue was Gen Holland M. Smith. He had been a major player in improving upon the newly codified amphibious landing doctrine,<sup>15</sup> and had allowed Edson to train his command as a raiding unit before it was even designated the 1st Separate Battalion. A great believer in a highly specialized amphibious landing unit, Smith continued to champion the newly formed battalions. All of this was for now transparent to Carlson, as he had his own training to accomplish.

Carlson had seemingly succeeded in making each man believe he was a critical part of something bigger. The Gung Ho meetings provided a forum for information to flow rapidly up and down the chain of command. Just as important as information, understanding flowed up and down the chain. It is impossible to determine if the men of the 2d Raider Battalion had internalized the devotion to the American cause as Carlson envisioned, or if they were caught up in being part of an elite organization.

Whatever the reason for their confidence, the 2d Raiders were ready to be tested and eager to prove their prowess. Two companies were detached from the battalion in June 1942 to reinforce marines already fighting on Midway Island. American forces were taking a beating in the Pacific, and a plan to divert Japanese attention from upcoming Guadalcanal landings was hatched. As this operation was probably the first truly commando-type raid for either Raider Battalion, the eyes of the Marine Corps, and those of the President, were on Carlson and the plan to raid Makin Atoll.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maj Jon T. Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville: Marine Raiders in the Pacific War*, Marines in World War II Commemorative Series (Washington D.C.: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1995), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Blankfort, *The Big Yankee* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Evans F. Carlson, *The Chinese Army, Its Organization and Military Efficiency* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Blankfort, *The Big Yankee*, 24.

<sup>5</sup> R. G. Rosenquist, *Our Kind of War: Illustrated Saga of the U.S. Marine Raiders in World War II*, (Richmond: The American Historical Foundation, 1990), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Rewi Alley, *Six Americans in China* (Beijing, China: Interkul, 1985), 215. The idea of volition as an imperative to a sense of duty appeared as a common theme in his speeches to civilian groups just prior to World War II. The notes he wrote in preparation for these speeches also revealed his belief in reasoned discipline and self-reliance—two themes key to his future leadership of the Raiders.

<sup>7</sup> Carlson, *The Chinese Army*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Blankfort, *The Big Yankee*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Maj Gen Oscar F. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All, The Raider Marines of World War II* (Irvine: ReView Publications, 1995), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> Rosenquist, *Our Kind of War*, 58.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Hoffman, *From Makin to Bougainville*, 1.

## Chapter 3

### Raider Results and Beyond

*As a military venture this raid was not of any great import; its significance lay in the fact that America had taken the offensive; that American men had out-witted, out-fought and out-maneuvered the Japanese at their own game. It was significant also because these Marine Raiders had demonstrated how individual intelligence and individual resourcefulness can be applied with benefit to military operations, when they are developed and brought to bear in the democratic way.*

—Lt Col Evans F. Carlson  
Speech, August 1943

The 2d Raider Battalion saw only two significant battles under Carlson, Makin Atoll and Guadalcanal. In May 1942, prior to the raid on Makin, two companies were detailed from the Battalion to support operations on Midway. Carlson did not accompany these men and they returned to his command in June. Although small in number, Gung Ho Raiders were big in impact. At Makin Atoll America tasted its first victory in the Pacific, and at Guadalcanal the tide of the war was turned. Instant celebrity was good for the Raider cause but the extra attention brought Carlson's detractors out of the shadows. His seeming lack of military hierarchical structure (equality for all), combined with a Chinese slogan based on the good of the group, were ready fodder for those who questioned his ideological loyalties. Still labeled a communist by many, his days of command were numbered.

## Makin Atoll

The impetus for the raid on Makin vary from tactical concerns to issues of public opinion, but most historians agree that the overarching objective was to raid an island to divert Japanese attention from Guadalcanal. In his book *Bless 'Em All--Marine Raiders of World War II*, retired Maj Gen Oscar F. Peatross, a lieutenant in the 2d Raiders and a participant in the Makin raid, describes the decision to use raiders for the mission with contextual clarity. Commodore Haines commanded the pair of submarines used to transport the Raiders to Makin.

Commodore Haines explained...that many targets for our raid had been considered...to boost the morale of our nation. After considering all factors, an objective in the Gilbert Islands seemed the most realistic. This was the area of deepest Japanese penetration...its exposed position might have left it sufficiently sensitive to a raid as to bring out the reaction we desired, which was to deter the immediate reinforcement of Guadalcanal. "That," he concluded, "is how we selected Makin Atoll as the target and August 17, 1942, as d-Day."<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of how seriously the Raiders faced their task, there was never any doubt in the minds of upper echelons of the potential for a public relations coup, an American rallying point, if the raid were successful. Carlson was certainly familiar with the workings of the press from his days in China, but foremost in his mind was the task at hand.

Carlson had built a mock-up of the island and the two companies practiced landings in their rubber boats. Here Carlson was not as successful with the quartermasters. The standard motor on the issue rafts was not strong enough to effectively move the boats through the surf and tended to become easily waterlogged. Despite numerous requests, no other motors were provided for the operation. So with the original motors and rafts loaded aboard, the Raiders set off to the Gilberts in two submarines, the *Nautilus* and the

*Argonaut*. Upon reaching the objective, the weather was worse than anything the Raiders had faced during rehearsals at Hawaii, and the sea conditions quickly overwhelmed the underpowered motors. From the start, supplies were lost and much more effort was expended just getting to the beach than was ever anticipated.

Not all raiders arrived at their planned beaches. The rough seas required Carlson to change plans, but radio silence meant that raiders in the other submarine, and those already on their way to the beach, never got the word. Confusion persisted until the companies eventually returned to Hawaii. Operations on the island were generally uncoordinated by now and consequently, individual initiative was the order of the day. The seas were so rough that the craft led by then Lieutenant Peatross of B Company actually landed behind Japanese lines.

Carlson gained control as much as possible and directed the battle as best he could. Simply accounting for men ashore became a daunting task. For much of that first day, the Raiders were overwhelmingly successful in their mission to destroy the enemy and gather intelligence. The Japanese were well equipped and had been alerted to watch for activity. Enemy planes strafed the Americans, but Japanese reinforcements never arrived.<sup>2</sup> The stories of individual heroism and courage were many. The first Medal of Honor for an enlisted Marine in World War II was awarded to Sergeant Clyde Thompson for his actions that day on Makin.<sup>3</sup> The islanders provided critical information to the Raiders and were a key element of their success.

But the story of leadership that day was many faceted. Carlson's actions would be questioned for years to come. Lost boats and equipment, and even lost men made the decision to return to the submarines at the appointed time a difficult one. While a few

made it back in the dark, many were washed back to the beach with no boats, no weapons and no ammunition. Carlson once again had to develop a contingency plan. Not knowing how many men had made it to the subs, how many had died trying, and how many enemy were still active on the other side of the island, he decided to offer surrender. The many Raider wounded were lined up on the beach and Carlson may have seen no other alternative. Although he ordered the men to continue returning to the submarines as best they could, Carlson had resigned himself to turning himself, the wounded, and those that remained, over to the Japanese. The officer sent to deliver the surrender note passed it to an enemy soldier who was soon after shot by another raider not aware of the plan. The lack of organization on the island was evident. The same raider who shot the messenger eventually made his way back to Carlson and reported that no enemy resistance remained on the island. Thoughts of surrender were put aside.<sup>4</sup>

The Raiders completed their mission the next morning and spent the day gathering weapons, documents, counting enemy killed and tending to their own dead. The four remaining rubber boats and a native outrigger were organized to return raiders to the submarines.<sup>5</sup> Unable to account for his troops because companies were mixed between the two submarines, the final tally for the raid was not possible until their return to Hawaii.

Officially, of the 222 raiders that began the mission, 18 were killed in action and 12 were considered missing.<sup>6</sup> The submarines were met at port with a hero's welcome. This was to be a Raider victory for America with Carlson at the helm. Any report of contemplated surrender was left out of the press reports. The unique character of Carlson and his unit won instant attention from the media. The entire Raider concept now seemed

validated to its proponents. The spotlight shining on the concept in general, and Carlson in particular (he received a second Navy Cross for the raid) galvanized the contempt of their detractors.<sup>7</sup> On the troop side, the spotlight made it easy for the men of the 2d Raiders to wear their war wounds proudly, and believe even more fervently in everything the “old man” had been teaching. Their exploits took on larger than life proportions with the release of the movie “Gung Ho” touted as a factual account of the heroic and courageous actions of the 2d Raider Battalion. Carlson was portrayed as the quintessential Marine leader, and Gung Ho became a part of American dialect.<sup>8</sup>

## **Guadalcanal**

The 1st Raider Battalion in conjunction with the 2d Battalion, Fifth Marines had moved in July 1942 to take Tulagi in the Solomon Islands chain in support of the effort to secure the airfield on nearby Guadalcanal. The marines assaulted the island and the 1st Raiders eventually set up defensive positions that circled a ridgeline on the southeastern end of the island. They were very successful and proved they were Raider tough. MGen Vandergrift eventually moved the 1st Raiders to Guadalcanal to help defend the airstrip. Again, their audacity carried the day. From here, Lt Col Mike “Red” Edson and his men emplaced positions along a ridge to protect the airfield. The fighting was extraordinary and casualties were high. For two months, disease and enemy bullets depleted nearly three fourths of the battalion, but the Japanese didn’t break the 1st Raiders. After a hard fought and climactic naval battle, reinforcements were coming to what was to be named Edson’s Ridge and Colonel Edson earned a Congressional Medal of Honor for his valiant leadership.

After Edson’s Raiders were replaced and shipped off the island, Major General

Vandergrift tasked Carlson's Raiders to secure an area that was to be developed into a second airfield. The plan was to land on the island with two companies and assault forward to contact enemy forces. The result has come to be called "The Long Patrol." Again, individual initiative was the hallmark of Carlson's command. These were now battle hardened veterans who knew how to fight. Always low on food and water, the raiders appreciated even more their unorthodox training back at Jacques Farm. Any questions the men had about Carlson's state of mind on Makin were replaced with respect on Guadalcanal.

The patrol began on 6 November and for its duration, the Raiders were almost exclusively on their own, with only infrequent communication to higher headquarters. Large numbers of Carlson's men succumbed to disease and had to be evacuated, but those that remained continued the fight. The results of their organized and continual assault added to their legend. As J. Robert Moskin writes in *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, "The 400 Raiders hiked 150 miles and fought a dozen guerilla skirmishes in the jungle. By December 4, they had lost 16 killed and 18 wounded and figured they had killed 488 Japanese. It was a historic patrol. Carlson won his third Navy Cross."<sup>9</sup>

After the distinctive success of both Raider Battalions, there was a scramble to train more marines for these commando units. The 1st Raider Regiment was formed and Carlson was relieved of command to take up duties as Regiment Executive Officer, and not long after was medically evacuated to the States for malaria treatment. Although many of the men remained part of the Gung Ho 2d Raider Battalion, it became clear that much of the spirit of work together had been centered on their leader. Lt Col Alan Shapley, who did not approve of Gung Ho meetings, the smaller fireteam organization,



and the general democratic methods Carlson espoused, took command. With the formation of the Raider Regiment came standardized battalion organization. The 2d Raider Battalion was soon disbanded and brought back into the mainstream of Marine Corps training. After his convalescence, Carlson returned to the Pacific to act as an official observer at Tarawa and helped plan the invasion of Saipan. He was never again to command, and failing health led to his retirement.<sup>10</sup> By this time he was the stuff of heroes to the American people. To the Marine Corps however, he was a threat. Col David Shoup, a commander at Tarawa, a Medal of Honor winner, and future Commandant of the Marine Corps, summarized the opinion of Carlson's contemporaries, "He may be red, but he's not yellow."<sup>11</sup>

The 1st Raider Regiment was deactivated and reorganized as the 4th Marines, a standard three-battalion infantry regiment, effective February 1944. The battalion chosen for complete disbanding was the Second Raiders. Some of the Gung Ho Raiders were re-distributed among the other battalions and the remainder formed the 4th Marines Weapons Company. In less than two years, Marine Raiders, and one of their most unique and forceful leaders, became a page in Marine Corps history.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Maj Gen Oscar F. Peatross, *Bless 'Em All, The Raider Marines of World War II* (Irvine: ReView Publications, 1995), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 78. The Japanese eventually returned to the island, recovered the surrender note, and used it as propaganda throughout the rest of the war. It was apparently the topic of many Tokyo Rose broadcasts. Private McCall, one of two raiders sent to deliver the note recalled that, "Carlson told me not to say anything about it." Captain Coyte, the other raider on the surrender mission submitted a report of the incident that was rejected. He relayed to General Peatross, "After they had been submitted, they were returned to us by Colonel Carlson who advised us that Admiral Nimitz had told him that we should re-

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write our report, deleting all reference to the offer of surrender.” The American propaganda mill, it seems, also had designs on the Makin Raid.

<sup>5</sup> Lt W. S. Le Francois, “We Mopped up Makin Island,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 216, no. 23 (4 December 1944): 20.

<sup>6</sup> When Maj Roosevelt returned to Makin after it was recaptured by the Army in 1943, General Peatross writes that 21 graves were found. It is assumed that three of the twelve originally reported missing were buried here. The other nine supposed survivors of an attempt to return to the island after successfully making the initial return trip to the submarines, had been attacked by enemy aircraft fire and assumed lost. They apparently did however, make it to shore. This was unknown to Commodore Haines and Carlson, so the nine were left on the island where they subsequently surrendered and were reportedly executed by the Japanese. The executioners were eventually convicted of war crimes.

<sup>7</sup> Certain historians and military men of the day believed that the Makin raid only forced the Japanese to strengthen their position in the Gilberts which led to a bloodier than necessary Tarawa invasion. MGen Peatross asserts that Tarawa could have been totally bypassed, and even so, the mission to raid Makin did not come from Carlson, but from Nimitz’s staff, so any blame for the focus of the mission should be directed there. Considering the mission of the raid, and the enemy killed and equipment destroyed, versus Raiders killed and equipment lost, the mission was a definite success for the U. S.

<sup>8</sup> The movie, *Gung Ho*, produced by Walter Wanger of Universal Studios is certainly less than accurate in many respects. Randolph Scott, a leading man of choice for the time, played Carlson. According to Blankfort in *The Big Yankee*, Carlson was an on location consultant to the film. He even went so far as to reorganize living arrangements when he noticed that the situation did not live up to the ideal of “Gung Ho”—the actors occupied plush quarters while crewmembers were in tents. The movie was successful for a limited time. Viewing the film, one is struck with the unabashed and unrelenting positive tone of events—to the point of fabrication. It certainly was aimed at providing a rallying point for national pride and hero worship.

<sup>9</sup> J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1987), 276.

<sup>10</sup> According to his medal citations, Carlson twice volunteered to act as courier between the beachheads and Division Headquarters at Tarawa. For Saipan, he was awarded the Legion of Merit by Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, again for volunteering to go to the front lines and report back with the situation as well as for his planning ability.

<sup>11</sup> Peatross, *Bless ‘Em All*, 75.

## Chapter 4

### Lessons and Conclusions

*They were gathered from near and gathered from far, They were picked from the best in the land; A hell-raising crew that sailed the blue was Carlson's Raider band.*

*They carried machine guns like pistols, they say, And a knife that was tempered in hell; And the raiders all claim no mortal by name could use them one-quarter so well.*

—Pvt Vernon C. Akers  
*Carlson's Raiders*

Although Carlson's tenure as a commander was short, the mark he left on military tactics, and his leadership principles have intertwined and endured. His methods concentrated on followership as much as leadership, with both based on the touchstone of ethical indoctrination. His unit's rallying cry "Gung Ho" provided a constant reminder of the basic precepts he endeavored to instill in his men. With his personnel philosophy outlined, he applied the same functional candor to evaluating his unit's organization and equipment. Many of his innovations have become standard in today's American military.

Then as now, small military teams require intense cohesion and have little room for non-performers or misunderstandings of intent and purpose. By immediately outlining his high expectations when recruiting his unit, Carlson began the process of creating pride in the unit. Promise of rigor beyond anything they had known, combined with individual interviews, created an atmosphere of exclusivity and leadership commitment

recognized by those that aspired to join, and by those that were intimidated at the prospect.

This leadership method was codified at Carlson's first Commander's Call. His informal demeanor was new to most of the marines but the message was clear. Carlson explained that much would be required of each man and that officers and enlisted men must share the harsh conditions of training and battle. The often used adage that "officers should never give an order they would not execute themselves" took on practical relevance and consequently Carlson, as well as his other officers, earned universal respect and credibility among their troops. This first meeting also established the ethical standard Carlson expected. While the slogan Gung Ho had a more literal context for Carlson than for his men, they nonetheless accepted the battlecry as a summation of their commitment to each other and to the mission. By delineating high standards for his men, and not compromising the standards for himself or for other officers, Carlson developed the cohesion necessary to sustain his unit through trial on the battlefield.

To reinforce unit cohesion, and foster understanding leading to synergy of action, leaders must be accessible and ideas, problems and solutions must flow up and down the chain of command. Small units generally have the luxury of defining their own bureaucracy. Carlson truncated the normally filtered process via his weekly Gung Ho meetings. These forums not only eased information exchange and provided an understanding of the context of their training or operation, but they also gave each raider a sense of ownership and responsibility for the mission. This often allowed for accurate and effective initiative when command guidance was unavailable. When Lt. Peatross' boat landed far southwest of the main body on Makin Island, he and his men were able to

continue the mission, improvise actions, and decisively aid the main assault. The same was true on the long march when platoons were often unable to communicate with headquarters.

Since tactical communication is often a problem within small units when engaged in battle, each man must know his purpose. Carlson took this lesson to an extreme and went beyond the context of an individual operation, but taught each man about the purpose of the unit to the fight and the purpose of the fight to the nation. This was the crux of his philosophy of ethical indoctrination. Living, eating and sleeping together, that is identifying one's self as part of a whole, fosters a sense of responsibility to others within a unit. Likewise, understanding one's relationship to the entire context of the war may foster a sense of responsibility that translates into energetic or righteous action on a unit level.

Thoroughly explaining mission expectations and associated risks had an interesting corollary effect for the 2d Raiders. Harsh training strengthened their bodies, and it seems that understanding their environment strengthened their minds. Many units during World War II, indeed all wars, were plagued with psychiatric casualties. Although it has long been accepted that the intangible will to fight and to protect one's comrades has sustained fighting men, Carlson's ethical indoctrination appeared to add another sustaining intangible to the mix: a sense of self determination and control over one's situation. By fostering initiative on the individual level, and combining that initiative with enough tactical information on the battle, each raider may have felt empowered to take action and improve the harshest of situations. Mental preparation translated to physical courage.

Some of the Guadalcanal Marines were sent into battle psychologically well prepared. They were the famed and heroic 'Carlson's Raiders'...In

this group of a thousand men, under Lieutenant Colonel Evans F. Carlson, only one case of traumatic war neurosis occurred, despite the fact that the Raiders fought under the same conditions as the other Marines...Carlson set out to train his men along lines opposed to the conventional outlines of U.S. military procedure. Perhaps more than any other American officer in this war, he has practiced his conviction that training must foster not stifle a soldier's individual initiative...because his men understood what they were fighting for; because the Raiders trusted him implicitly—they suffered virtually no psychiatric casualties.<sup>1</sup>

Here the leadership lesson is to train individuals as a force to themselves so that when integrated together, they produce synergistic effects that inspire greater individual effort. Every raider was important to every mission. Tied to this self-actualization is a strong belief in the leader's competence and concern. For a military leader, this culminates on the battlefield.

Carlson was attuned to individual and unit action in combat. This, he believed, was the proof of any military leader's ability. While his leadership philosophies were unconventional for the World War II era Marine Corps, his ideas for organization and outfitting forces were innovative and better received. The overarching lesson was to concentrate on the general mission of the unit to dictate structure, tactics and equipment.

Understanding the limited effective span of control of a single leader during combat and the need for independent fire and maneuver, Carlson invented the fireteam. Reducing a squad leader's direct contact to three fireteam leaders rather than ten to twelve individuals allowed for more effective and timely force employment. Critical to effective employment of the fireteam was increased firepower. Adding assault rifles into the mix made each team more lethal. Because their mission was small team assault, this simple restructuring and rearming enabled the Raiders to be more flexible and deadly in combat. The fireteam structure has remained the standard for infantry forces in every branch of service to this day.

Added firepower was not the only change Carlson made to his Table of Allowances. As previously described, the notion of camouflaged uniforms was born during planning for the Makin raid. A wide variety of patterns have evolved since World War II, but the concept remains the same. In addition to task specific uniforms, specially designed knives as standard issue continues to this day. Not only did these innovations improve combat effectiveness, they were also tangible evidence to his men that Carlson cared about them, and wanted them to be as prepared and deadly as possible.

A final tactical lesson to be learned from Carlson is to train for expected conditions. Intensive physical training made the problems presented by the ineffective rafts used during the Makin raid surmountable, and the harsh conditions of the long patrol on Guadalcanal survivable. Each man must be capable of physically completing the mission. Before the 50-mile marches during training at Jacques Farm, American troops were not required to withstand such endurance tests. Although Carlson paid much attention to developing the minds of his men, he did not ignore their physical stamina.

On a more universal level, Carlson was an example of the notion that shared hardship unifies a team and improves performance beyond the sum of individuals' efforts. As the U.S. military faces recruiting and retention problems today, the only branch not severely affected is the Marine Corps. Generally recognized as the "elite" fighting force for the nation, they pride themselves on the rigor of their training and high expectations for individual sacrifice. Just as Carlson did not have recruiting problems when he advertised for his raiders, the same holds true for the present day Corps. Believing one can accomplish the extraordinary is the first step toward achieving that goal. The Marine Corps recently introduced the notion of "The Crucible" to recruit

training. The idea was to put recruits into a situation that would stress them beyond what they believed they could withstand in order to develop an identity to sustain them through future stressful situations. This was the same concept Carlson used when training his men.

The lessons one can learn from Carlson's example can certainly go beyond the leadership principles of instilling the mission, developing cohesion, enabling accessibility, and organizing, equipping and training for the task. His precedent of personal integrity and responsibility to disclose and act on intolerable conditions is a model for political activism in the most honorable sense. Outside of this individual relevance for personal conduct, his example of leadership is gaining in significance. The aforementioned principles and Carlson's application of them seem better suited to a Special Forces unit than to a lumbering brigade or wing. However, as America becomes embroiled in smaller contingencies and operations other than war, smaller units are deployed which need to function effectively without echelons of oversight.

Basic to all of this training and ethical indoctrination, is the notion that man has a responsibility in peace and in war to a greater good. This is what breeds responsibility for one's own soul, a comrade's welfare, and the completion of the mission. While most small unit leaders will not have the leeway that Carlson did to select and train troops virtually without interference from above, imbuing the common cause, creating esprit de corps, and fostering cohesion, will always be critical to mission success and the hallmark of an effective leader.

While it is tempting to view Carlson and his methods as an anecdotal footnote in American military history confined to his specific context, his example is more universal.



Perhaps never again will a commander have such unbridled domain over those in his charge, or as free a hand to organize, train and equip. Despite these qualifiers, the democratic approach to military leadership can be applied to small teams today. Just as in Carlson's day, the approach must be grounded on leadership competence and strength of character. The conviction of righteousness, and each individual's ability to rise to unimpeachable conduct is perhaps the most difficult of Carlson's traits to emulate. He is American history, an independent mind subordinated to the common cause by decision—democracy in action.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Psychiatric Toll of Warfare," *Fortune* 28, no. 6 (December 1943): 280.

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